

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----211658Z 026029 /45

O P 211634Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BONN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6665
INFO USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS PRIORITY

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EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS ACTION SECDEF IMMEDIATE AND
INFO USNMR SHAPE PRIORITY.

MILITARY ADDEES TREAT AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, PARM, GW
SUBJECT: FRG DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER'S MARCH 15/16
VISIT TO WASHINGTON

REF: STATE 060506 DTG 180600Z MAR 77

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE AMBASSADOR IS SCHEDULED TO MEET WITH
DEFENSE MINISTER LEBER ON MARCH 24 IN ORDER TO DIS-
CUSS THE RESULTS OF THE FRG DEFENSE MINISTER'S MAY 15/16
VISIT TO WASHINGTON. PENDING SUCH A FIRST-HAND APPRAI-
SAL, PERSONS CLOSE TO MINISTER LEBER
DESCRIBE HIM AS DELIGHTED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY MARKS OF
ATTENTION HE RECEIVED WHILE IN WASHINGTON. AT THE SAME
TIME, THE MINISTER IS UNDER NO ILLUSIONS THAT ALL
PROBLEMS HAVE EVAPORATED AS A RESULT OF HIS DISCUSSIONS.
DIFFICULTIES COULD ALSO ARISE BECAUSE MINISTER LEBER
HAS BEEN TELLING THE PRESS THAT THE U.S. WILL ADOPT A
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120MM GUN FOR ITS XM-1 TANK WHILE HE HIMSELF APPEARS TO
REALIZE THAT THE U.S. COULD REMAIN COMMITTED TO THE
105MM GUN. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBOFF CALLED ON DR. MARTIN BLOCH, MINISTER OF
DEFENSE LEBER'S PERSONAL ASSISTANT, ON MARCH 21 TO HAVE
PRELIMINARY DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE GERMAN PERCEPTIONS

OF THE RESULTS OF MINISTER LEBER'S MARCH 15/16 VISIT TO WASHINGTON. BLOCH COULD HARDLY FIND WORDS STRONG ENOUGH TO EXPRESS HIS MINISTER'S PLEASURE AT HIS WASHINGTON RECEPTION: "THE MINISTER FEELS EXTREMELY WELL ABOUT HIS VISIT"; "HE IS FULLY SATISFIED"; "ALL PREVIOUS HESITATIONS HAVE DISAPPEARED"; "THE VISIT WAS AN 'EXTREMELY GOOD ONE'." OTHER EMBASSY SOURCES HAVE CONFIRMED THE MINISTER'S GREAT PLEASURE AT THE TREATMENT HE RECEIVED DURING HIS WASHINGTON VISIT.

2. WHILE BLOCH DID NOT ATTEND THE MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, HE STATED THAT THE MINISTER HAD TOLD HIM HOW APPRECIATIVE HE WAS OF THE PRESIDENT'S KINDNESS IN RECEIVING HIM. LEBER FULLY REALIZES THE PROTOCOL IMPLICATIONS OF THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT RECEIVING A DEFENSE MINISTER AND HOW THE PRESIDENT MAY BE PLAGUED BY REQUESTS FROM OTHER DEFENSE MINISTERS FOR LIKE TREATMENT. NOT ONLY DID MINISTER LEBER APPRECIATE THE SIGNAL HONOR DONE HIM, BUT HE WAS ALSO "MOST SATISFIED" WITH THE RESULTS OF HIS DISCUSSIONS WITH PRESIDENT CARTER.

3. BLOCH SAID THAT MINISTER LEBER WAS ALSO VERY IMPRESSED BY HIS MEETING WITH SECRETARY VANCE. THEY HAD ACHIEVED A "VERY FAR-REACHING UNDERSTANDING" ON MOST IMPORTANT POINTS. LEBER WAS ALSO PLEASED WITH HIS CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENTIAL SECURITY ASSISTANT BRZEZINSKI. OF COURSE, IT WAS HIS SEVEN OR EIGHT HOURS OF DISCUSSION WITH SECRETARY BROWN WHICH PERMITTED TREATMENT IN DEPTH OF MUTUAL PROBLEMS. THE MINISTER
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RETURNED TO BONN WITH THE HIGHEST RESPECT FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE NEW ADMINISTRATION. HE FOUND THEM TO BE EARNEST AND EFFECTIVE. NOT ONLY WERE THEY EFFECTIVE IN THE WAY THEY WORKED TOGETHER AS A TEAM, THEY WERE ALSO EFFECTIVE IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE FRG.

4. BLOCH WENT ON TO PARAPHRASE LEBER'S OWN RESUME OF HIS WASHINGTON DISCUSSIONS: "UPON THE BASIS OF SUCH A GREAT AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE, CONDUCTED IN A FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE, AND ACHIEVING SUCH SOLID UNDERSTANDING, THERE COULD NEVERTHELESS BE MINOR DIFFERENCES. IN THIS, THE U.S.-FRG RELATIONSHIP RESEMBLES A GOOD MARRIAGE IN WHICH THE PARTNERS HAVE MINOR DISAGREEMENTS WHICH DO NOT IMPERIL THE EVEN COURSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP." ACCORDING TO DR. BLOCH, THE MINISTER WAS THINKING OF THE TANK HARMONIZATION AND AWACS (SEPTEL) PROBLEMS WHEN HE REFERRED TO THESE MINOR DIFFERENCES. IN POINT OF FACT, BLOCH WENT

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ON, NOTHING HAD BEEN DECIDED DEFINITELY ON THESE TWO
QUESTIONS. BOTH PARTIES HAD AGREED TO WORK TOWARDS
SOLUTIONS WHICH COULD TAKE CONSIDERABLE TIME TO ACHIEVE.
BLOCH HAD SAID THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT BOTH PROJECTS
MIGHT FAIL, EVEN THOUGH BOTH PARTIES WOULD DO THEIR BEST
TO SEE THAT THEY DID NOT. SHOULD THE WORST OCCUR
HOWEVER, BASIC U.S.-FRG FRIENDSHIP WOULD PREVAIL.

5. EMBOFF THEN REFERRED TO THE PRESS CONFERENCE WHICH
MINISTER LEBER GAVE MARCH 18, SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN
FROM WASHINGTON. AT THAT TIME THE MINISTER HAD STATED
THAT THE U.S. AND THE FRG INTEND TO "INTRODUCE A TANK
ABLE TO USE THE SAME AMMUNITION, THAT IS WHICH HAS A
JOINT GUN...". ALSO "THE U.S. AND THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC HAVE
JOINTLY RESOLVED -- AND THESE ARE DECLARATIONS BY TWO
GOVERNMENTS -- TO REALIZE THIS JOINT CONCEPT DURING THIS
YEAR. WHAT IS STILL OPEN IS THE AMERICAN DECISION WHICH
120MM GUN WILL BE INTRODUCED, NOT IF. THIS IS IMPORTANT
BECAUSE THE U.S. AT THE PRESENT STILL HAS A 105MM GUN.
HERE CONGRESS HAS IMPOSED A CONDITION ON THE AMERICAN
GOVERNMENT TO WHICH THE GOVERNMENT IS, OF COURSE, BOUND.
THE SAME WOULD BE TRUE IF IT HAD HAPPENED IN THIS COUN-
TRY. THE UNITED STATES, HOWEVER, WILL MAKE A DECISION
THIS YEAR AND IN SO DOING WILL HAVE TO SELECT BETWEEN THE
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120MM GUNS WHICH CAN BE TESTED DURING THIS YEAR, THAT IS THOSE WHICH ARE AVAILABLE."

6. WHILE BLOCH WAS OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF THESE REMARKS BY MINISTER LEBER, HE TOOK A RATHER DIFFERENT TACK. HE REFERRED TO CONTINUING GERMAN SKEPTICISM THAT THE BRITISH 120MM GUN WOULD BE READY FOR TESTING BY THE END OF THE YEAR. IF THAT GUN WERE INDEED READY AND PROVED TO BE SUPERIOR, THE FRG WOULD ADOPT IT, HE SAID. AS FAR AS THE U.S. ADOPTION OF A TANK GUN WAS CONCERNED, THE FRG RECOGNIZED THIS TO BE AN AMERICAN PREROGATIVE. BLOCH WENT SO FAR AS TO ADMIT THAT A U.S. DECISION IN FAVOR OF THE 105MM GUN WAS NOT OUT OF THE QUESTION.

7. EMBASSY COMMENT: MINISTER LEBER IS WELL KNOWN AS A MAN WHO LIKES TO ESTABLISH PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIS COLLEAGUES ABROAD. HIS DELIGHT, NOT ONLY IN HAVING DONE SO, BUT IN HAVING RECEIVED SUCH SPECIAL TREATMENT IS OBVIOUS TO ONE AND ALL. THIS MADE HIS VISIT A RESOUNDING SUCCESS.

WE FEEL SOME UNEASINESS, HOWEVER, THAT LEBER MAY BE TELLING THE GERMAN MEDIA ONE THING REGARDING THE TANK GUN WHILE HE HIMSELF KNOWS THAT SOMETHING ELSE IS THE CASE. ANYONE LISTENING TO A TAPE OF HIS MARCH 18 NEWS CONFERENCE IS BOUND TO FEEL THAT LEBER RECEIVED AMERICAN ASSURANCES THAT THE U.S. WOULD ADOPT A 120MM TANK GUN. YET BLOCH MADE IT APPEAR THAT LEBER RECOGNIZED THAT THE U.S. MIGHT STILL OPT FOR THE 105MM. THIS LATTER INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS OF HIS MEETING WITH SECRETARY BROWN SEEMS TO AGREE WITH THE REPORT CONTAINED REFTEL, WHICH STATED THAT "BOTH SIDES AGREED...THAT THE U.S. WOULD NEED SEVERAL MONTHS OF TESTING OF ALL EXISTING GUNS IN AUTUMN 1977 BEFORE IT CAN DECIDE ON ARMAMENT FOR THE XM-1."

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THE AMBASSADOR HOPES TO OBTAIN FURTHER CLARIFICATION DURING HIS MARCH 24 MEETING WITH MINISTER LEBER. END COMMENT.

STOESSEL

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